

MUNICIPAL FOOD DEPARTMENTS IN MODERN WAR.

OLE SALTHER,

*Assistant Director, Bureau of Food and Drugs, Department of Health,
City of New York.*

THE principal difficulty in preparing a paper on this subject is that in most of the larger cities there is no municipal food department. As a general rule, such functions as relate to food control are distributed amongst several branches of the City Government. Most of the food work performed in the larger cities is carried on by the Health Department. In addition, there is generally a market department which supervises the municipal markets of the city and then there is usually a mayor's committee or commission which handles such food problems as do not come under the control of either of the aforementioned departments. Inasmuch as the functions of each of these departments are closely related to each other, and as a proper food control not only should insure a freedom from adulteration and fraud but should also take into consideration the economic features of a food supply, it seems that all the functions in connection with a municipal food control should come under the supervision of one department or commission. Inasmuch as practically all phases of food control have a direct relation to health, such department or commission should have the same broad, general powers with respect to food control as the health departments now have in matters of public health, especially such powers as are exercised by the Health Department of

New York City. To more clearly emphasize this point, the present conditions in New York City, with respect to its milk supply, may be cited. With the increase in the price of milk there has been a gradual decrease in consumption and, during the past few months, there has been a marked increase in the death-rate of children due to diarrhoeal diseases. While this increase in the death-rate cannot be definitely attributed to milk, nevertheless it is very significant. It would appear that, with the decrease in the consumption of milk, other foods have been substituted which have not the same food value as milk and are not as nourishing or as easily assimilated by infants as milk. Thus it will seem that, while it is important that a food supply must be safe and wholesome, it is also important that the supply of staple foods must be abundant and that the prices of same must not be prohibitive. These defects in organization are pointed out for the reason that it is rather difficult to establish an effective food control unless the proper machinery is supplied. Before leaving this thought, it might also be pointed out that, in addition to the overlapping of functions of the municipal departments, the state has generally two or three departments which exercise supervision over certain features of the food supply of a large city. For instance in the state of New York there are four

different state departments and one state food commission which exercise supervision over certain phases of New York City's food supply. In addition to this the United States Government, through several departments, also exercises supervision over certain phases of the city's food supply. While it is necessary that both the United States Government and the state should exercise supervision over certain phases of the food supply, it is, nevertheless, a fact that some of the function performed by these departments, especially the departments of the state, are and can be just as effectively enforced by the municipality. There, therefore, is a great need for a thorough clarification of the functions of these authorities so as to eliminate all duplication of effort and have a clear understanding and agreement as to division of functions.

One of the first steps a municipal food department should take during the war would be to so arrange its organization that it could be ready to coöperate to the fullest extent with the United States Government, the United States Food Administration or such other governmental agencies as are charged with the supervision of the food supply. The municipal food departments should be ready to supply promptly such local information as might be requested by the aforesaid bodies.

During the progress of the war the municipal food department should continue to enforce its laws and regulations and there should be no relaxation of the rigid enforcement of same because it is just as important to main-

tain the same standards of quality and wholesomeness during the war as during peace and probably more important for the reason that certain unscrupulous food dealers might take advantage of the conditions in the trade and sell foods which were highly adulterated or grossly misrepresented or misbranded. It might be advisable, however, for the municipal food department to consider all its activities and eliminate such as have no direct relation to the food situation or are not founded on good reasoning.

The municipal food departments should take steps to procure accurate statistics concerning the amount and kinds of foodstuffs received in the city and the places where it is handled and stored and how much of the food supply is actually consumed in the city. This information would be especially valuable as a factor in determining how long a city could be self-sustaining without outside assistance. At present I believe that the absence of such information is a material hardship to every municipal food department. Most of the departments can give a fairly accurate statement as to the amount of foodstuffs received but have no figures as to the amount of foodstuffs that remain in the city or how much is consumed there. In New York City for instance the total receipts of food are tabulated by the Health Department, but it has been unable to obtain accurate figures as to the proportion of the food which actually remains in the city and is consumed there. Such information could only be obtained after consid-

erable work and the department has not the facilities to accomplish this.

The next important feature and probably the one of paramount importance during the war is the duty of endeavoring to eliminate food waste. The first step taken by the municipal food department in this direction should be by organizing a system of inspection of its food supply as it is brought into the city. This could be accomplished by placing inspectors at the various receiving points. The food could then be examined not only as to its quality but also as to the conditions under which it is received and the manner in which it has been packed and transported. In instances where the foodstuffs show a percentage of decay or spoilage, the municipal food department could immediately order the overhauling and repacking of same so that the sound foodstuffs could be saved and further deterioration prevented. In such instances the municipal food departments should procure all the facts concerning the shipment of such foodstuffs from the time of packing at the point of production until its receipt. This would include a thorough examination of the foodstuffs in order to obtain, if possible, the condition in which it was packed. Observation should also be made as to the condition of the packages in which the foodstuffs were shipped, information as to the date of shipment, so as to determine if the foodstuffs were unnecessarily delayed in transit, and a thorough examination should be made of the railroad car to determine the ventilating and refrigerating facilities. With the information thus obtained,

the food department should notify either the shipper or railroad as to the reason of spoilage, with a view of having same corrected in future. The municipal food department should also bring this to the attention of the Federal Department and to the attention of the state from which the foodstuffs had been shipped so that the state could coöperate with the shipper with a view towards improving the methods of packing and shipping. In New York City this has been tried out with the result that during the first eight months of this year over 2,000,000 pounds of unsound foodstuffs have been prevented monthly from being mixed with the commerce of the city. The majority of this food was sorted from sound food and failure to have taken this precaution would undoubtedly have resulted in a much greater loss by the time such foodstuffs reached the consumer. About one hundred shippers in twelve different states of the Union have been notified by the department as to the reasons for condemnation and causes of spoilage have been pointed out. Where the merchant refuses to overhaul foodstuffs which contained partly unsound and sound food, because of the fact that it would be a monetary loss for him to comply with this order on account of the prevailing labor conditions, the municipal food department should endeavor to save the sound portion of these foodstuffs. This might be done in several ways. In New York City for instance, during the past summer, a group of public-spirited and patriotic women organized a Canning Kitchen and, with the

coöperation of the Health Department who made it possible for them to obtain these foodstuffs which had been abandoned and would have been sent to the dump, these women overhauled same with the assistance of Boy Scouts and under the supervision of inspectors of the Health Department and up to the present time they have rescued approximately 35,000 pounds of sound foodstuffs which otherwise would have been destroyed. Where the Canning Kitchen could not use some of these foodstuffs, on account of their limited facilities, these foods were sent to charitable institutions where they were overhauled by the inmates under the supervision of inspectors of the Health Department and the sound material rescued from the dump.

Another duty which the municipal food department should perform during the war should be the issuance of daily price reports which would give the retail prices of the various staple foods and would also give the price of perishable foods in season. This report should also give advance information as to the market conditions and when certain perishable foods would be abundant. This report could also be of educational value to the consumer in that it would give information as to the various foods which were abundant and cheap. This report should be published with the coöperation of the daily newspapers and should also be printed in all of the local newspapers, including those printed in foreign languages.

During the progress of the war, the department should be especially alert in eliminating food waste due to trade

custom in handling food. As an instance of this, the experience of the Health Department in the inspection of beans might be cited. During the early part of this year a large quantity of Brazilian beans were placed upon the New York market at a time when there was an unusual demand for beans because they were recommended as substitutes for other foods which were particularly high in price. Upon inspection it was found that a percentage of these beans were buggy or fly-infested. Where the infestation did not exceed 5 per cent the beans were permitted to be sold. At the time a considerable quantity of these beans were placed in storage and upon recent inspection it was found that the majority of the beans were fly-infested. These beans are now being subjected to a process of fumigation, but if this process had been applied at the point of shipment little or no loss would have resulted.

A study of the various food industries in the city should also be made with a view of eliminating food waste. As an example as to what can be accomplished by such a study, an investigation of the methods employed in a large macaroni factory might be cited. In the manufacture of macaroni, there is a certain amount of waste in the trimming which is permitted to fall upon the floor and become trampled upon. This waste is gathered up at the end of the day, placed in barrels and eventually sold for chicken feed, and this particular factory averaged from twenty to thirty barrels of waste each month. With an arrangement so made as to catch such trimmings be-

fore they fall to the floor, there is no reason why same should not be utilized for human food.

The municipal food department should also advocate the use of substitutes for staple foods and should encourage the consumption of such products that could be used as human food but are not owing to some foolish prejudice. As an instance of this, might be cited the use of horse-flesh for human food. The Freibank system which is used in Germany should also be installed in the cities, and thousands of pounds of meats which are now being condemned and used for fertilizer could be properly sterilized so as to be rendered safe for human consumption.

A municipal food department should also study its market and terminal facilities and should promote and advocate the establishment of adequate terminal markets, so as to eliminate all unnecessary handling in transit.

The municipal food department

should also be empowered, in cases of actual or anticipated emergency on account of shortage of necessities, by reason of excessive charges or otherwise, to purchase food with municipal funds or on municipal credit. This food could be placed in storage and then sold to the inhabitants in such manner and through such agents as it may determine.

In conclusion I might state that there are other duties which the municipal food departments could perform during the progress of the war but the time does not permit me to elaborate further and I have endeavored to select what, in my opinion, appear to be of primary importance. There are two important features which I would like to stress particularly in this paper, namely the elimination of the duplication of effort in the enforcement of laws and the rigid adherence to a program in which the elimination of food waste is foremost.



An Ode to Health.—Health of itself makes life a perpetual joy. Nothing daunts, nothing overawes, nothing discourages and nothing overpowers the man and woman possessed of health. Health means not only vigor and energy of body, but also clarity and strength of mind; purity and beauty of soul. The healthy person dominates life instead of allowing life to dominate him. He scarcely thinks of his body as consisting of parts or as performing separate functions. To him the body is but one harmonious whole. He is a unit, a being, a man; complete, vigorous, perfect. To such a man work is a joy. He regards obstacles as but opportunities for testing his strength. He hardly knows what

weariness is. He never experiences exhaustion. Merely to grasp his hand is a pleasure. To gaze into his eyes is a joy. To hear his voice is to feel a thrill pass over one. To peer into his mind serves as a stimulus to higher achievement. Health supplies the courage, the aggressiveness in life. Without health one is bankrupt regardless of what his financial capital may be. He becomes a cipher in the world of real men and women. If you have health, then friends, cherish it, guard it and treasure it as you treasure life, for out of it are the issues of life.—*Monthly Bulletin, Indiana State Board of Health.*—From *Cincinnati Sanitary Bulletin*.